

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
17 June 1984

BUSINESS WORLD: THOUSANDS OF AMERICANS FAIL AT FOREIGN ASSIGNMENTS
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STAT

U.S. business spends millions each year to relocate workers on overseas assignments, but it may be money poorly spent unless they are properly prepared for their new life.

About 100,000 companies do business overseas, including 25,000 firms with foreign office affiliates and 3,500 major multinational companies.

One-third of U.S. profits come from international business and one-sixth of the nation's jobs are created by foreign trade.

"In spite of those statistics, no more than 10 percent of the companies that do business overseas do anything at all, no language or cultural training, to prepare them for the experience," said Lewis Griggs, producer of a four-part film series aimed at educating overseas business travelers on what to expect on foreign assignment.

When he first began exploring the idea of making the Going International films, Griggs said he was hit by a barrage of helpful offers from companies anxious for him to complete the task. He was blazing a trail no one had thought to explore before.

"They not only wanted the films, but wanted to help us in making them," Griggs said.

The four films, dealing with cultural differences, doing business with foreigners, the problems of families living abroad and re-entering the American way of life after foreign duty, are not specific training courses. They offer common sense suggestions about how to make the transition.

"The issues are soft. All we're talking about is interacting with other people in a different culture. That's really what it's all about," Griggs said. "They are not profound films. They are profoundly simple."

Buyers of the award-winning films run the gamut of American business and government. They range from Texaco and Georgetown University to IBM, Coca Cola, Ford and the CIA.

The idea planted by the films is that anyone going to work in a foreign country, be they executives, sales personnel or oil field workers, should at least do a little homework on their new station and familiarize themselves with its customs before making the move.